

Book Review: "Jesus Christ King Of The Church"

by Porteous (Published by The James Begg Society.)

The James Begg Society have reprinted the classic Presbyterian work on Church government by Porteous. It originally published in 1872 under the title: The Government of the Kingdom Of Christ. An Inquiry As To The Scriptural, Invincible, and Historical Position of Presbytery.

The brethren have produced a fine book; the content is exceptional, and the book itself is a well bound hard cover volume of 340 pages, on quality paper. It will last, and it is excellent value.

Porteous divides his material into two main parts. The first is "An Inquiry as to The Essential Scriptural Principles of Church Government"; pages 1-108. The second addresses the proposition: "Presbytery - Untenable or Invincible?";

The chapters are mostly only 6-7 pages. At the end of every chapter is a principle. This is a concise statement expressing the truth explained in that chapter. There are also a series of questions that unfold the various aspects of the teaching in each chapter. This means that the book is perfectly suited for use as a tool for instruction in the principles of church government. Here is a means to really strengthen our understanding and practice of Biblical Church Government!

In the first part (25 short and easy to read chapters) Porteous treats the whole concept of the Church, focusing upon the Church as the kingdom of Christ. This leads logically to a consideration of the laws and form of government given by Christ the King. In this section we find a thorough consideration of the permanent officers in the church; their qualifications, position, power, function, calling, and ordination. Porteous provides a very clear and helpful discussion of the elders office, showing that there is one office with two aspects; namely, teaching and ruling.

Many readers will be aware that our distinctly "Presbyterian" understanding, in contrast with that of some brethren of Dutch Reformed extraction, is that Scripture uses the designation "Church" when referring to more than one congregation in the same locality. Not only the local congregation, but several congregations are "the Church." Porteous explains this under the principle: "The congregations of a locality form one church, which is governed by the associated elders of these congregations." He also treats the deliberative assembly in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, drawing out the principle that: "Administration of difficult cases of doctrine, discipline, worship, and government is authoritatively effected by assemblies of representative elders." Here, in part, is the Biblical basis for the authority of Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly.

The second main section of the book leads us through a consideration of the various un-Biblical forms of church government that have been devised. We learn of some that are extreme toward the autonomy of the local congregation, Separatism, Libertinism, Independency, and Congregationalism. Then there are others that wrongly centralise the government into an hierarchy: Prelatic Episcopacy, and Papacy. Porteous concludes with a masterly chapter on the biblical form of government titled: "Government Harmonised." Porteous outlines three important conditions of good government: Liberty, Authority, and Unity.

If I may address the brethren of the EPC for a moment. Brothers and sisters, over the years, and again in more recent times, the unity and peace of the Church has been troubled by a serious lack of understanding of the principles of Christ's government of his church. THIS book is a timely, and suitable tool that could be used in every home and congregation with a view to overcoming this weakness. Reviewed by Rev. Chris Connors.

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